

**Task Force for International Cooperation on  
Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research**

**Country Report on Holocaust Education and Remembrance in Task Force Member  
Countries**

**ISRAEL**

Date of Issue: May 2005 [Re-submitted]

**Full report following the question guideline:**

**1. What official directives from government ministries and/or local  
authorities regarding the teaching of the Holocaust exist in your country?  
Please attach these directives to your answer.**

Since 1982, a minimum of 30 hours of Holocaust studies, as part of the discipline of history, has been mandated in all state Israeli high schools by the Israeli Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport. (The official updated directive was published on December 1, 1998 in *Hozer Mankal* Number 59/4.) It is usually taught in the eleventh and twelfth grade. History teachers mostly devote between 20 to 30 classes on this topic, and a question related to the history of the Holocaust has become an integral part of the history matriculation exam given to high school students. In addition, Israeli students who choose elective subjects as part of their matriculation, such as Hebrew literature or Jewish philosophy, are also tested on aspects related to the Holocaust. Since 1999, the Holocaust has also become a recommended part of the junior high school curriculum.

**2. If the Holocaust is not a mandatory subject, what percentage of schools  
choose to teach about the Holocaust?**

Not applicable

**3. How is the Holocaust defined?**

It is generally accepted that the term Holocaust, or the Shoah in Hebrew, refers to the murder of six million Jews who were killed on the basis of pseudoscientific racial ideology by Nazi Germany and its collaborators.

**4. Is the Holocaust taught as a subject in its own right, or as part of a  
broader topic? Explain the reasoning behind this decision.**

In Israel, the Holocaust is taught as both a separate subject and as part of a broader topic, such as the history of world civilisations. Since the Holocaust is part of Jewish history and Israeli history, and its commemoration is part of the national calendar, aspects of this subject are often addressed in many different educational settings.

**5. At what age(s) do young people learn about the Holocaust in schools? Do  
students encounter the Holocaust more than once? Please give details.**

Since students already in daycare frameworks hear the two-minute siren commemorating the Holocaust, children of young ages are annually exposed to this important aspect of Jewish history in Israel. Therefore, Israeli children begin hearing about the Holocaust already in preschools and this subject is discussed every year in educational frameworks, both formal and informal.

**6. How many hours are allocated to teaching and learning about the Holocaust in schools?**

See Question 1.

**7. In what areas of study (history, literature, sociology and theology) is the Holocaust taught? In each case, briefly outline the rationale for teaching the Holocaust in this particular subject area.**

The Holocaust is often taught in classes of a variety of disciplines in schools, such as literature, history, music, theology, drama, computers, foreign languages, art, philosophy, psychology, sociology and others. Since the Holocaust is part of Jewish and Israeli history, and its commemoration is an integral part of the national calendar, aspects of this subject are often addressed in many different educational settings and contexts.

It is important to note that numerous high school students are engaged in Holocaust-related projects throughout the school year and not only a few days prior to Holocaust Remembrance Day. For example, pupils have composed music to Holocaust poetry and have given public performances in their communities; interviewed Holocaust survivors about their life stories; collected pages of testimony from old-age homes and created art exhibitions on Holocaust-related themes.

**8. (a) What historical, pedagogical and didactic training is provided to teachers of the Holocaust at either the university level or the professional development level in your country?**

**(b) How many teacher-training sessions are held each year, and how many teachers are involved?**

**(c) What funding is available in the teaching of the Holocaust in your country?**

Courses on various aspects of the Holocaust have been taught in all major Israeli universities by world-renowned scholars such as Professors Yehuda Bauer, Yisrael Gutman, David Bankier, Dan Michman, Daniel Blatman, Dalia Ofer, Otto Dov Kulka, Dina Porat, Saul Friedlander and others. At the Institute for Contemporary Jewry at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, many graduate students have concentrated on Holocaust studies. In addition, courses on the Holocaust are also taught every semester in almost all Israeli colleges and preparatory programmes for those students who seek a teaching certificate.

In Israel, as well as in other countries, teachers are often encouraged to attend seminars in order to obtain obligatory continuing-educational credits that are recognised by governmental authorities. They also participate in such courses in an effort to improve their

salaries, retain their teaching licenses and/or to improve their teaching skills. Of course, teachers also enroll in courses for their own personal enrichment even if they have no intention of ever teaching a particular subject. In Israel, teachers who have completed six years of work are usually eligible to take a sabbatical during their seventh year from their teaching duties in an effort to devote themselves to studies of their own choice. Teachers unions often subsidise the cost of such training courses.

In the early 1980s, many Israeli high school teachers came to the realisation that they had to begin preparing classes on their own in order to adhere to the new requirements of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport. In an effort to help teachers comply with the mandate to teach the Shoah, Holocaust memorials in Israel began to offer courses for high school teachers, specializing in Holocaust history and pedagogical techniques. Over the last decade, teachers of younger grades have also turned to memorials, requesting age-appropriate educational materials and didactic suggestions on how to answer younger children's questions on what happened during the Shoah.

As a result of this situation, Holocaust memorials and professional teacher organisations have developed continuing-education courses for Israeli teachers on issues in Holocaust education. These courses usually contain both academic and pedagogical components, featuring lectures by scholars and educational experts. A number of organisations annually offer teacher-training seminars throughout Israel, such as Yad Vashem, the Ghetto Fighters' House, Massuah, Moreshet, Beit Theresienstadt and others. (For more information about the Ghetto Fighters' House, see [www.gfh.org.il](http://www.gfh.org.il); for more information about Massuah, see [www.massuah.org](http://www.massuah.org); for more information about Beit Theresienstadt, see [www.bterezin.org.il](http://www.bterezin.org.il).)

In recent years, many of these institutions have worked together to organise teacher-training seminars of 56 or 112 hours in various locations, especially in the periphery. For instance, in 2004/05, Yad Vashem is simultaneously coordinating 20 teacher-training courses throughout the country. In Sderot alone (located south of Ashkelon), 120 educators every week are attending a course on educational methods in teaching the Holocaust. In addition, teacher-training courses about the Holocaust are now also offered in Hebrew for continuing-education credit recognised by the Israeli Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport via the Internet.

**9. Has your country instituted a national Holocaust Memorial Day? If so, in which ways is this day marked and commemorated? What difficulties have you encountered in establishing this day of remembrance in the national consciousness?**

Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Day (Yom Hashoah in Hebrew) is a national day of commemoration in Israel, on which the six million Jews murdered in the Holocaust are memorialised. It is a solemn day, beginning at sunset on the 27th of the Jewish month of Nisan and ending the following evening, according to the traditional Jewish custom of marking a day. On the Jewish calendar, Yom Hashoah falls soon after the Passover holiday (in which Jews remember their bondage in Egypt) and a few days

before Israel Independence Day. Places of entertainment (such as theatres, dance halls, restaurants and cafes) are closed and memorial ceremonies are held throughout the country. It is important to note that there is high national media coverage of the special events that take place on this day.

The central ceremonies, in the evening and the following morning, are held at Yad Vashem and are broadcast on the television. Marking the start of the day—in the presence of [the President of the State of Israel](#) and [the Prime Minister](#)—dignitaries, [survivors](#), children of survivors and their families, gather together with the general public to take part in the memorial ceremony at Yad Vashem in which six torches are lit, representing the six million murdered Jews who were killed by Nazi Germany and their collaborators.

The following morning, the ceremony at Yad Vashem begins with the sounding of a siren for two minutes throughout the entire country. For the duration of the sounding, work is halted, people walking in the streets stop, cars pull off to the side of the road and everybody stands at silent attention in reverence to the victims of the Holocaust. Afterward, the focus of the ceremony at Yad Vashem is the laying of wreaths at the foot of the six torches, by dignitaries and the representatives of survivor groups and institutions. The martyred dead are remembered not as abstract, anonymous numbers, but as individual human beings with personal identities.

Other sites of remembrance in Israel, such as the Ghetto Fighters' Kibbutz (Beit Lochamei Haghetat), Massuah at Kibbutz Tel Yitzhak and Kibbutz Yad Mordechai (named in honor of Mordechai Anielewicz, a leader of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising), also organise memorial ceremonies, as do all schools and universities, military bases, municipalities and even many places of work. Throughout the day, both television and radio stations broadcast programmes about the Holocaust. Special internet-based dialogues are also organised. Traditional prayers, such as *Kaddish* and *El Maleh Rachamim*, as well as poems and last letters composed by Holocaust victims are traditionally recited at many ceremonies. Holocaust survivors, who are now passing the torch of memory to future generations, are invited to tell their personal stories in schools on Yom Hashoah.

Many Haredim (ultra-orthodox Jews) prefer to observe the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the Hebrew month of Tevet rather than Holocaust Remembrance Day. During this traditional fast day known as the 'Yom Hakiddush Haklali', psalms and prayers are recited for the martyred. A few Haredim refuse to stand at attention for two minutes while the siren is sounded throughout the land, claiming that this is not a traditional Jewish custom of expressing sorrow. However, the vast majority of Jewish religious leaders have ruled that one should stand at attention during these two minutes out of respect.

In recent years, there have been questions raised about changing traditional commemorative programmes in order to attract the attention of younger generations, and

therefore a number of 'alternative' ceremonies and activities on Holocaust Remembrance Day have been organised, especially in the Tel Aviv region.

**10. Has your country established a national Holocaust memorial and/or museum? What numbers of students visit this memorial/museum each year?**

Visits of school children to Holocaust memorials and museums, such as Yad Vashem, The Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority in Jerusalem founded in 1953; the Ghetto Fighters' House at Kibbutz Lochamei Hagetaot in the northern part of the country established in 1949 by Holocaust survivors among them ghetto fighters and partisans; and Massuah at Kibbutz Tel Yitzhak are organised on a daily basis. At Yad Vashem, during peak periods prior to Yom Hashoah (Holocaust Memorial Day), it is not uncommon to see more than 40 groups of visitors per day (each group comprising on the average 30 persons).

According to the data collected by the International School for Holocaust Studies at Yad Vashem, more than 100,000 Israeli high school students visit Yad Vashem very year. These students come from all over the country, representing different religious streams and socio-economic backgrounds. For example, in recent years thousands of Arab and Jewish students (including new immigrants and children from disadvantaged homes) who study in the framework of vocational schools supported by the Israeli Ministry of Labor and Welfare have visited the International School for Holocaust Studies at Yad Vashem.

According to the statistics compiled by the Ghetto Fighters' House, their museum has been visited annually by some 10,000 drop-in visitors, and more than 75,000 individuals participate in the Museum's educational programming. It should also be particularly noted that students from both the Jewish and Arab sectors visit the Center for Humanistic Education located at the Ghetto Fighters' House. Additional smaller centres, such as Beit Terezin, Moreshet, Nir Galim, Ot Vaed, Shem Olam, Ginzach Kiddush Hashem, Yad Lezahava and numerous others also work with thousands of students every year as well.

**11. Please estimate the percentage of students in your country who visit authentic sites, and list three primary sources of funding available in your country for visits to authentic sites.**

For approximately 20 years, Israeli students have been travelling on study tours to Poland, primarily to bear witness at Nazi extermination camps, such as Majdanek, Auschwitz-Birkenau, and Treblinka. In addition, many school groups also visit other sites as well such as preserved synagogues, Jewish cemeteries (particularly where well-known Jewish personalities or religious leaders have been buried) and the areas where former ghettos were erected by the Nazis and their collaborators. It is estimated that 24,000 Israeli high school students participate in study trips to Poland every year (approximately 20 percent of Israeli Jewish high school students). The journeys to Poland, which are overseen by the Israeli Ministry of Education, have become a rite of passage for many

Israeli youths at a formative age who are on the verge of beginning their army or national service.

It is also important to note that all guides of Israeli school groups in Poland are required to be certified by the Israeli Ministry of Education upon their successful completion of a seminar of 270 study hours. In addition, it should be kept in mind that these trips in the main are funded by the pupils' themselves or by their families. Since the prices of these trips are prohibitive to many students and their families, a few Holocaust museums and memorials, such as Yad Vashem, have developed alternative Holocaust-related programmes within Israel for those pupils who do not journey to Eastern Europe.

After their return from Poland, pupils often assume leading roles in the coordination of ceremonies on the 10th of the Hebrew month of Tevet (a fast day for observant Jews) and Yom Hashoah in their respective schools as well as in their youth movement groups, such as the Israeli scouts. In addition, some pupils are required to make presentations on their trip to their younger counterparts in school and in essence become witnesses, passing the legacy of remembrance to future generations.

Overall, most pupils pay for their trips to Poland from personal or family-based funds. The average cost of such organised trips to memorial sites in Poland amounts to approximately US\$1,200—quite costly considering the average salary of Israelis. However, many high school students work odd jobs in order to pay for their trip or they coordinate fundraising activities in order to obtain funding (such as raffle tickets, car washes, etc.). In addition, there are schools that raise money from private individuals and institutions in an effort to help defer the cost of the trip, especially for those youngsters who lack financial support.

**12. What are the three major textbooks used in teaching the Holocaust in your country? How many pages do your school textbooks allocate to the Holocaust, and on what aspects do they focus?**

Over the last five years, a number of new textbooks on the chronology of the Shoah for Israeli high school students have been published. For example, Nili Keren, *Shoa: A Journey to Memory* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv Books, 1999); and Yisrael Gutman, *Shoah and Memory* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem and Zalman Shazar Center, 1999). Keren's book is divided into four sections, focusing on the following major topics: 'Prelude to Genocide', 'The Perpetrators', 'The Victims', and 'The Bystanders'. Gutman's book, officially authorised by the Israeli Ministry of Education, is part of a two-book curricula set, coupled with a book about the Jews in world history over the last decades edited by Eliezer Domke. By beginning with a detailed picture of multifaceted aspects of Jewish life and culture before the Second World War, this two-part curriculum attempts to reinforce the students' understanding that many Jews lived within modern, western societies. It is important to note that mostly all of the history books published in the last five years have incorporated new aspects of historical research, have placed a strong emphasis on the daily existence of Jews who lived during the Shoah, and have dealt with issues of Holocaust memory. In addition, these textbooks also highlight Jewish settlement

in Palestine vis-a-vis the Shoah, and the experience of Holocaust survivors after the founding of the State of Israel.

**13. What strategies of differentiation are typically used to make the study of the Holocaust accessible to students of different ages and with different learning needs?**

A wide range of age-appropriate materials have been designed by various institutions, especially by the International School for Holocaust Studies at Yad Vashem, over the last decade. Moreover, special educational programmes for students with disabilities in a number of schools have been created—and in 2003, a group of 11 students with disabilities from the On School in the Central Region of the country participated in the March of the Living.

**14. How far and in what ways is your country's own national history integrated into the teaching of the Holocaust?**

In the State of Israel, we continue to grapple with our history and continuity in the shadow of the Shoah, and we are firmly committed to Holocaust education, commemoration, and research. The context of teaching about the Holocaust in Israel, the national home of the Jewish people in which the majority of Holocaust survivors chose to settle after the Second World War (approximately 250,000 displaced persons), is very different than teaching about this human chronicle in any other country. Clearly, the social and historical context of Israeli society has a profound influence on Holocaust education and remembrance and in many ways is still perceived as a 'biological wound', according to the well-known Israeli novelist Aharon Appelfeld. Moreover, not only has the Holocaust become an integral part of our popular culture as denoted in literature, films, theatre productions and television programmes, but rather it has also become associated with many Israelis' national/Jewish identity.

**15. What are the three major obstacles to teaching and learning about the Holocaust in your country?**

Overall, we continue to observe a strong interest in the Holocaust among Israeli students. In comparison to teachers in other societies who may encounter 'Holocaust fatigue' among youngsters, Israeli students are generally very interested and motivated to learn about this subject.

It is also important to keep in mind that although students usually come to classes about the Shoah with some prior knowledge, this is not always an advantage for teachers. Teachers in Israel often have to challenge their students to reanalyze what they 'know', and understand the complex subject matter in light of what happened to the victims, bystanders, perpetrators, and rescuers during this period. Often what students have absorbed over the years in Israel from the culture of memory is compartmentalised and anchored in symbols and political slogans that are employed by both right- and left-wing politicians and personalities. The politicisation of the Holocaust has become a serious

problem; for instance, the “orange badge affair” in Autumn 2004 as part of the Jewish settlers’ campaign against the Israeli government’s disengagement plan of Gaza settlements.

Quoting the late Abba Kovner, a ghetto fighter and well-known Israeli writer: ‘And perhaps this is the pedagogic imperative of the post-Auschwitz generation, to try and engrave into the memory of the coming generations the message of our generation, a difficult but a true and an honest message...’ Obviously, the future trends of Holocaust education and remembrance in any country, even in the State of Israel, remain open-ended.

Unfortunately, Holocaust survivors, many of whom were pioneers in building the State of Israel and soldiers in defending its borders, are now passing away. Many educators in Israel are struggling with the challenge of how we shall remember the Holocaust without survivors among us. They are also asking: ‘What goals do we want to transmit to the next generations? How do we want the story of the Holocaust to impress upon students’ individual and national consciousness, and what impact do we, as educators, want it to have on our identity as individuals and as a collective? How does the imperative to remember apply to the individual and to humanity as a whole? Last, but not least, should we relate the study of the Holocaust to other genocides and contemporary events?’ These open-ended questions, often openly highlighted in the Israeli and Jewish media, will undoubtedly continue to be discussed and debated in the future.